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ABSTRACT

The conflict in Bosnia (Yugoslavia) has confronted U.S. leaders with fundamental questions about the use and capability of U.S. power abroad. This document brings the decision facing the United States into the classroom. The unit features a set of four divergent options for U.S. policy toward the Bosnian conflict, and a brief account of Yugoslavia's turbulent history. This unit was developed in response to the immediate crisis in Bosnia. It is meant to serve as the basis for a 1 to 2 day activity. Background reading offers a concise introduction to the events of the 20th century that have contributed to the current crisis in what was once Yugoslavia. The opening section of a report by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on ethnic cleansing in Bosnia is included as a resource for students to draw upon. Four options for U.S. policy are suggested with variations on each and supporting and opposing arguments for each. The opinions are: (1) use force to stop the genocide; (2) press for a negotiated settlement; (3) contain the conflict to Bosnia; or (4) keep our distance. Initially, students may be best able to work with the options in a role play setting. Small groups can be assigned to act as advocates for an individual option. Following the role play, students should be called on to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the options, and voice their own ideas on what U.S. policy should be. (DK)

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CHOICES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The Struggle For Peace In Bosnia: Considering U.S. Options

ALTERNATIVES FOR PUBLIC DEBATE AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

A project of the Center for Foreign Policy Development

Brown University, Box 1948, Providence, RI 02912

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The Choices for the 21st Century Education Project develops curricula for high schools and colleges on current foreign policy issues and offers workshops, institutes, and in-service programs for high school teachers. Course materials place special emphasis on the importance of educating students in their participatory role as citizens.

The Choices for the 21st Century Education Project is a project of the **Center for Foreign Policy Development** of the Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies at Brown University.

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Note to Teachers

The conflict in Bosnia has confronted U.S. leaders with a number of fundamental questions about the use and capability of U.S. power abroad. As during the Persian Gulf War, Americans are again weighing our national interests in a distant region and pondering our responsibilities for stopping aggression.

The Struggle for Peace in Bosnia: Considering U.S. Options brings the decision facing the United States into the classroom. The unit features a set of four divergent options for U.S. policy toward the Bosnian conflict, as well as a brief account of Yugoslavia's turbulent history. This unit was developed in response to the immediate crisis in Bosnia. It is meant to serve as the basis for a one to two day activity.

The unit's background reading, which includes "Questions for Consideration" on page 9, offers a concise introduction to the events of the 20th century that have contributed to the current crisis in what was once Yugoslavia. On pages 10-11, you will find the opening section of a report by the UN Commission on Human Rights on ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. Either the background reading or the UN report can be used to familiarize students with the situation in Bosnia. In considering the framework of policy options, students should be encouraged to draw from these resources.

Most teachers familiar with the Choices approach find that initially students are best able to work with the options in a role play setting. As in other Choices units, small groups can be assigned the task of acting as advocates for an individual option. They should be expected to present the position of their respective option to the class. Other students may serve as members of an evaluation panel.

Following the role play, students should be called upon to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the options, and voice their own ideas on what U.S. policy should be. To conclude the unit, students may be asked to outline their recommendations for President Clinton in a brief essay that could be sent to the White House, to members of Congress, or to a local newspaper.

The Struggle for Peace in Bosnia: Considering U.S. Options was developed by the Choices for the 21st Century Education Project staff with the assistance of the research staff of the Center for Foreign Policy Development, scholars at Brown University, and several other experts in the field. We wish to thank Paul Aicher and Martha McCoy of the Study Circles Resource Center for initiating this unit and for their helpful review of the options framework as it was being developed. We thank the following researchers for their valuable input:

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The Choices Education Project is providing this timely unit to educators who have demonstrated a commitment to introducing current foreign policy issues into the high school classroom in a way that encourages critical thinking, cooperative learning, and the development of civic judgment — all essential ingredients of active citizenship. We hope you have an opportunity to make use of this unit during the remainder of the 1992-93 academic year. If you would like to receive additional crisis mini-units in the future, please mark the form on the back page of this booklet and return it to us. We look forward to your continued support.

Option 1

Use Force to Stop the Genocide

The United States cannot turn away from the slaughter in Bosnia. What is taking place is not simply another example of ethnic conflict. Rather, Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic is carrying out a genocide against the Bosnian Muslims. Not since the era of Hitler and Stalin have such heinous crimes taken place in Europe. As the most powerful country in the world, the United States has no choice but to act. We have a moral obligation to halt the planned extermination of an entire people. Stopping the criminals will not be easy. The Serbian leaders have cunningly engaged in peace talks while carrying out their policy of genocide. We cannot allow ourselves to be manipulated. Regardless of what happens at the negotiating table, the Serbian war machine has to be dismantled. Milosevic and his allies cannot be allowed to go unpunished. If Serbian atrocities continue, Americans should be prepared to send troops into what was once Yugoslavia. In the Persian Gulf, our leaders were willing to risk the lives of American soldiers to force Iraq's Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. We should do no less today to protect innocent civilians in Bosnia from "ethnic cleansing." Stopping genocide is worth fighting for.

What policies should we pursue?

- If the Serbs continue their policy of genocide, the United States should take the lead in using military force to destroy the capability of Serbian forces to attack Bosnian Muslims.

- U.S. troops should, without delay, carve out "safe havens" in Bosnia and protect civilians within them from Serbian forces.

- The United States should press the UN to lift the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims and send U.S. ships to strictly enforce the blockade against Serbia.

Supporting Arguments

1. Resolute military action in Bosnia would send a strong warning to tyrants around the world considering genocidal policies.

2. Acting decisively in Bosnia now would deliver a crippling blow to the Serbian war machine and prevent the spread of conflict in the Balkans.

3. Destroying the military capability of the Serbian forces in Bosnia would eliminate one of the main obstacles to achieving a peace settlement in the area.

Opposing Arguments

1. Attacking the Serbs, who have long looked to Russia for protection, would jeopardize our relations with Russia and endanger world peace.

2. Fighting against Serbian forces would produce significant casualties among U.S. troops.

3. Moving toward military action against the Serbs would undermine progress toward peace in Bosnia and force the UN to abandon its humanitarian relief operations in the area.

Option 2

Press for a Negotiated Settlement

The brutality in Bosnia represents the greatest threat to the United States and its allies since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Atrocities against innocent civilians have been carried out in open defiance of international standards of decency. Most of the blame rests with the Serbs, but the Croats and Muslims also must bear some responsibility for the carnage. Now, the international community must press all three sides to end the Bosnian conflict. In the past few weeks, the first steps along the road toward peace were taken. The path will be bumpy, with many detours along the way, but we cannot allow this opportunity to slip away from us. Caution and consensus should be the guiding principles for U.S. policy in Bosnia. The United States should proceed with caution to keep the peace process on track. Pressure should be maintained, especially against the Serbian leadership. The blockade against Serbia, for example, may be tightened. The use of military force, however, should be a last resort. Moreover, the United States and its allies should build a consensus around the international community's response to the Bosnian conflict. Peace can be achieved only by confronting the aggressors in Bosnia with a united front that includes the United States, Western Europe, and Russia. No peace settlement will be perfect. The alternative, however, is infinitely worse.

What policies should we pursue?

- **The United States should support the UN peace process in Bosnia and encourage its allies to do the same.**
- **The United States should take the lead in offering troops for a UN peacekeeping force in Bosnia and help the UN care for the refugees that have been driven out of their homes by the war.**
- **The United States should use its economic, diplomatic, and military power to pressure all sides in the Bosnian conflict to work toward a peace settlement.**

Supporting Arguments

1. Building an international coalition to achieve peace in Bosnia would serve as a constructive precedent for future international crises.

2. Achieving a peace settlement in Bosnia through international cooperation would strengthen the growing partnership between the United States and Russia in world affairs.

3. A negotiated settlement overseen by the UN would provide an avenue to work toward the protection of minority rights throughout Bosnia.

Opposing Arguments

1. Drawn-out peace talks would only serve as a smokescreen for the Serbs to continue their genocidal policy in Bosnia.

2. Sending U.S. peacekeeping troops into Bosnia would entangle the United States in a bloody ethnic conflict that is likely to flare up again and again.

3. Lengthy, unproductive negotiations would set the stage for an outbreak of fighting in Kosovo, Macedonia, and elsewhere in the Balkans.

Option 3

Contain the Conflict to Bosnia

The spread of the conflict in Bosnia to other areas of the Balkans would pose a serious threat to international stability and U.S. interests in the region. Serbian attacks against the Albanian Muslims of Kosovo, for example, would set off a dangerous chain reaction. Albania would enter the war. In Macedonia, Albanians there would likely come to the defense of their kinsmen in Kosovo. Turkish leaders would also be under pressure to send troops to support their fellow Muslims, thus raising fears in Greece. In brief, the entire Balkan peninsula could go up in flames. To prevent an escalation of the conflict in the Balkans, the United States should send a clear message to the Serbian aggressors. Their campaign of territorial expansion must stop. A line must be drawn before the Serbs strike in Kosovo, Macedonia, and elsewhere. Meanwhile, we should recognize that there is little the United States can do to end the ongoing bloodshed in Bosnia. As much as we may wish to relieve human suffering throughout the world, we must come to terms with the limits of U.S. power and clearly identify our national priorities.

What policies should we pursue?

- The United States should bolster the UN team monitoring the peace in Kosovo and station a small U.S. force in Macedonia and other areas threatened by Serbian aggression.

- The United States should announce that an expansion of Serbian military operations will prompt a U.S. military response.

- The United States should tighten enforcement of UN sanctions to prevent additional military supplies from reaching the former Yugoslavia.

Supporting Arguments

1. By clearly stating the U.S. position in the Balkans, the United States would promote stability throughout the region.

2. Containing the conflict in Bosnia would narrow the options of leaders on all sides and force them to reach a negotiated settlement.

3. Using military force only to protect areas in the Balkans of vital national interest would lay the foundation for U.S. foreign policy in the years ahead.

Opposing Arguments

1. Turning a blind eye to the genocide in Bosnia while protecting U.S. interests elsewhere in the Balkans is equal to condoning Serbian brutality.

2. Unless the conflict in Bosnia is settled, fighting will inevitably spread to other ethnically mixed areas, such as Kosovo, Macedonia, and elsewhere.

3. The United States cannot afford additional military commitments at a time of record budget deficits and a long list of neglected problems here at home.

Option 4

Keep Our Distance

The United States must avoid being drawn into the ethnic conflict in Bosnia. Admittedly, the images we see on the nightly news are heartrending. We wish we could somehow end the bloodshed. And yet, we must recognize that we can do little beyond providing humanitarian assistance to the suffering. Attacking the Serbs or getting mixed up in UN peace efforts would only complicate the situation. The ethnic conflict that is taking place in Bosnia has deep roots. Sorting out right from wrong is impossible. All sides have committed atrocities and all sides have been victims of the war. We as Americans have no business pressing the claims of one ethnic group against another. Such a precedent would create the impression that the United States is prepared to intervene in the dozens of other ethnic conflicts around the world. Even limited use of force in Bosnia would put the United States on the path toward military escalation. Let us not forget that our involvement in Vietnam began with a few small steps. Instead of contributing to the violence in Bosnia, the United States should help to relieve the misery in the area. Bosnia's ethnic conflict can only be resolved by the people of the region.

What policies should we pursue?

- The United States should oppose the use of force by the international community in Bosnia.
- The United States should promote a balanced approach in dealing with the warring parties in Bosnia.
- The United States should support efforts to provide humanitarian relief in Bosnia.

Supporting Arguments

1. Staying out of the Bosnian conflict would allow U.S. leaders to refocus their attention on problems at home.

2. Without the possibility of outside intervention, Bosnian Muslim leaders would be forced to come to terms with the Serbs rather than hold out for international support.

3. Focusing our energy on humanitarian relief in Bosnia would better address the needs of the suffering.

Opposing Arguments

1. Keeping our distance from the slaughter in Bosnia would encourage other leaders to respond to ethnic problems with genocidal violence.

2. Without a firm U.S. stance, the conflict in Bosnia will spread to other areas in the Balkans.

3. Without stopping Serbian aggression, not only will humanitarian relief do little good in Bosnia, most of it will not even reach its destination.

Background Reading: The Roots of Conflict

For the past few months, a small country in southeastern Europe known as Bosnia* has emerged as a leading topic in the news. Television reports have brought home to Americans a glimpse of the death, brutality, and misery taking place in Bosnia. Meanwhile, U.S. leaders have taken an increasingly active role in international efforts to bring peace to the region.

Like the decision to go to war against Iraq or send troops to Somalia, U.S. policy toward the crisis in Bosnia ultimately involves all Americans. President Bill Clinton has acknowledged that there are no easy answers regarding what course of action the United States should take. In developing a U.S. response, he has looked to the views and opinions of the American people for guidance. Participating in the debate on Bosnia, however, requires that we understand the underlying causes of the violence that has ravaged this area.

History carries great importance in Bosnia, as well as in the other areas that until recently made up the country of Yugoslavia. This is a land where great empires have come and gone, leaving behind a tangle of cultures, religions, and animosities. Borders have seldom been drawn by the peoples of the region. Rather, they have been imposed by powerful outsiders. Today, the map of what was once Yugoslavia is at the center of a complex, multi-faceted war. The following pages will introduce you to the forces that contributed to the disintegration of Yugoslavia and help you clarify your thoughts on what the U.S. role in this part of the world should be.

Yugoslavia's Creation

Yugoslavia was created at the end of World War I. The war led to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman Turkish, and Russian empires. As a result, the leaders of the United States, Britain, and France — the three main wartime Allies — were largely responsible for redrawing the map of Eastern Europe. Some of the new countries they established, like Yugoslavia, brought together nationalities that had no history of sharing political power.

Bosnia consists of two regions, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Among the Allied leaders, President Woodrow Wilson was most committed to reshaping the international order. Wilson declared that self-determination — the right of each nation to govern its own affairs — should be a guiding principle in framing the peace settlement. Even with the best of intentions, however, the Allies faced an enormously complex task with respect to the region known as the Balkans in southeastern Europe.

Over the centuries, history and culture had left a complicated patchwork of nationalities in the Balkans. In the 19th century, a wave of nationalism swept over the region. Nationalists strove to unite their people within a single state. They looked to Britain, France, Spain, and the other nation-states of Europe as models. Nationalists succeeded in breaking free from Ottoman Turkish rule to form the states of Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia before World War I. In Austria-Hungary as well, nationalism threatened to tear apart the empire. Indeed, the spark for World War I was ignited in 1914 when the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian nationalist in Sarajevo, the present-day capital of Bosnia.

Shaky Foundations

The establishment of Yugoslavia, or land of the South Slavs, ran counter to the trend of nationalism. The state formed in 1918 had never before appeared on the political map. Rather than being based on the homeland of a single people, Yugoslavia brought together many different nations. Culturally, Yugoslavia had been a meeting ground for Greek, Turkish, Hungarian, Germanic, and Italian influences. Until 1929, the country was known as "The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes."

The Serbs, who had established an independent kingdom before World War I, were Yugoslavia's largest nationality. They were Eastern Orthodox Christians who looked toward Russia as their natural ally. Croats, the second largest group, were Roman Catholics. The Croats, along with the Slovenes, considered themselves closely tied to the civilization of central Europe. In addition,

more than 11 percent of Yugoslavia's population was Muslim, consisting mostly of Bosnians and Albanians. Although the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims shared the same language and racial background, they had never been united politically before 1918.

Yugoslavia was formed without much thought as to how political power would be shared among the country's nationalities. Yugoslavia's Serbian leaders believed that they were justified in dominating the new state. Not only had the Serbs gained experience in self-government before the war, but their army had fought fiercely against Austro-Hungarian forces during World War I. In proportion to its small population, Serbia's losses during the war were greater than any other country involved in the fighting. The Croats and Slovenes, however, resented Serbian control.

Yugoslavia's political foundations were shaky from the start. At the core of the country's instability was the friction between Yugoslavia's two largest ethnic groups, the Serbs and the Croats. Even after Yugoslavia's creation, Croatian nationalists held out hope that Britain, France, and the United States would support Croatian independence. In 1920-1921, Croatian leaders refused to participate in the assembly that drew up Yugoslavia's first constitution. They charged that top politicians in the old Serbian government were manipulating the process. Indeed, the constitution that was produced in 1921 concentrated power in Belgrade, the capital of both the new Yugoslavia and the old Serbia.

The Failure of Democracy

Parliamentary democracy in Yugoslavia during the 1920s failed to heal the country's divisions. From Belgrade, Serbian leaders ruled Yugoslavia with a heavy hand. The Yugoslav army was led almost exclusively by Serbian officers, while Serbs comprised the great majority of the top officials in the government. Little progress was made toward forging a "Yugoslav" identity.

In 1925-1927, a coalition government led by Serbian and Croatian parties ended amid squabbling between political leaders on both sides. The rancor culminated in 1928 when the head of the leading Croatian political party was assassinated in the parliament by a Serbian deputy. Yugoslavia's king responded in 1929 by suspending the constitution, dissolving the parliament, and establishing a royal dictatorship. Although King Alexander was a member of Serbia's royal family, he encouraged his subjects to think of themselves as Yugoslavs. The king set forth a uniform set of laws for the entire country. New administrative units were created, erasing "Croatia" and "Serbia" from the map.

By the early 1930s, however, the king faced widespread opposition, fed in part by the worldwide economic depression. Among the Croats, the extreme nationalist *Ustasha* movement gained strength. The group was dedicated to achieving Croatian independence through insurrection and terror. In 1934, the *Ustasha* was responsible for the assassination of King Alexander during a royal visit to France. Also implicated in the assassination was Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, who was eager to gain control of Yugoslavia's Adriatic coastline. Alexander's assassination was followed by a brief period of Serbian-Croatian cooperation.

Elections in 1938 prompted a renewed sense of uncertainty in Yugoslavia. The results made it clear that the Croats had not accepted Yugoslavia's political structure. In an attempt to hold the country together, the new government opened negotiations with Croatian leaders. In August 1939, a few days before the outbreak of World War II, a formal compromise was reached. A large Croatian province was created, containing roughly 30 percent of Yugoslavia's territory and population. Croats were given substantial autonomy to govern their affairs. The compromise, however, met immediate opposition. Serbs, Slovenes, and Bosnian Muslims demanded that they too be granted autonomy. Meanwhile, Serbs in Croatia feared that their rights would be violated. Finally, the *Ustasha* extremists opposed any move toward compromise and worked to subvert the government. When World War II reached Yugoslavia, no group, not even the Serbs, was strongly committed to defending the country.

World War II

In the months before Nazi Germany's attack on

the Soviet Union, Hitler used Eastern Europe as a staging ground. Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria were pressured to ally themselves with Germany. In early 1941, Hitler insisted that Yugoslavia likewise join the alliance and demanded that German troops be permitted to march through the country to reach Greece. With no hope of British support, Yugoslavia's Prince Paul reluctantly signed the Tripartite Pact. Within days, however, Serbian nationalists led a bloodless coup to overthrow him. The coup brought together the elements for a broad coalition government. But the new regime proved short-lived. Hitler flatly rejected compromise, and on April 6, 1941, the Nazis invaded without issuing a declaration of war. In less than two weeks, the Yugoslav army was forced to surrender.

Hitler viewed Yugoslavia as a vehicle for Serbian ambitions and quickly moved to dismember the country. Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Albania all annexed parts of Yugoslavia. At the same time, the Nazis created a separate Croatian state.

Nazi occupation of Yugoslavia opened a period of particular brutality. More than 1 million people died in Yugoslavia during the war. Roughly half of them were Serbs, many of whom were killed at the hands of the *Ustasha* in Croatia. In addition, two major guerrilla movements emerged to resist the Nazis — the Serbian-dominated *chetniks* and a communist organization that included all nationalities.

The communists and the *chetniks* battled for control of Yugoslavia even as they struggled against the Nazis. By 1943, the communist partisans had distinguished themselves as the most effective guerrilla group and had established a provisional government. After the Germans withdrew from Yugoslavia in 1944, fighting between the two groups intensified. The communists, led by Marshal Tito, ultimately emerged as the strongest force in the country.

Tito's Yugoslavia

The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was proclaimed by Tito in January 1946. Tito, who was half Croat and half Slovene, moved decisively to eliminate his opponents. The leader of the *chetniks* was executed and the Catholic archbishop of Croatia imprisoned. Tito struck out at his enemies, real and potential, with little regard for nationality. His first priority was to consolidate his own power, and he killed thousands of Yugoslavs in the process. In foreign policy, Tito sought to break free of Soviet domination. Unlike in other countries of Eastern Europe, the communist party in Yugoslavia had sunk deep roots before the end of World War II. Tito did not need Moscow to maintain power. On the contrary, Tito openly defied Soviet control, even after Soviet dictator Josef Stalin threatened to invade Yugoslavia in 1948.

Tito's Yugoslavia was no more politically stable than the Yugoslavia that had existed before World War II. Under Tito, the country was divided into eight administrative units. A complex federal system distributed political power among Yugoslavia's ethnic groups. The Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins, and later the Bosnian Muslims were recognized as "nations." Each group dominated their respective republic within the Yugoslav federation. In addition, there were other ethnic groups — most notably the Albanians and the Hungarians — who were classified as "nationalities." The areas where they lived were not given full republican status. Most of Yugoslavia's Albanians, for example, lived within the Serbian province of Kosovo.

At the center of the political balancing act was Tito himself. Tito feared that the Serbs would come to dominate communist Yugoslavia, much as they had dominated the country's government before World War II. He was also wary of Croatian nationalism. To offset the influence of the Serbs and Croats, Tito promoted the rights of Yugoslavia's smaller ethnic groups. A new constitution adopted in 1974 reflected Tito's efforts to contain the forces of nationalism and hold Yugoslavia together. The 1974 constitution shifted more power to Yugoslavia's republics. In addition, the Albanian and Hungarian minorities within the Serbian republic were permitted greater autonomy.

Yugoslavia's Disintegration

After Tito's death in 1980, Yugoslavia entered a period of economic and political crisis. The debts that Yugoslavia had accumulated in the 1960s and

1970s contributed to a drop in living standards. Without Tito's leadership, the country's power-sharing system gradually unraveled. Ethnic minorities in Yugoslavia's republics were increasingly subjected to discrimination as local leaders tightened control over their home regions.

In 1981, Albanians in Kosovo province staged a rally to demand additional autonomy. The demonstration, however, turned into riots with an anti-Serbian tone. Suddenly, Yugoslavia's long-simmering ethnic tensions were out in the open, and yet the country Tito had created was not equipped to cope with the deepening divisions. There was no free press, independent judicial system, or other institution where problems could be addressed. Instead, the voices of strident nationalism were increasingly heard, especially from the media of Serbia and Croatia.

In 1987, a hard-line Serbian nationalist, Slobodan Milosevic, won control of the communist party organization in Serbia. At a time when Yugoslavia's economic crisis was worsening, Milosevic promised to promote Serbian rights. He played on the importance of Kosovo in Serbian history, recalling that the region was the site of a decisive battle between Christian Serbs and Muslim Turkish invaders in 1389. Although the Serbs were defeated, Milosevic emphasized that Kosovo represented a sacred symbol of Serbian valor. More significantly, he decried the fact that Albanians made up 90 percent of Kosovo's population by the 1980s.

In 1988, Milosevic helped organize the Committee for the Protection of Kosovo Serbs and Montenegrins, which sponsored nearly 100 protest rallies. With the demonstrations as leverage, Milosevic moved to extend his power. He revoked Kosovo's autonomy, and then sent in the Yugoslav army to crush Albanian protests. The same measures were applied to the Serbian province of Vojvodina. In Montenegro, Milosevic put his supporters in charge of the local government. Meanwhile, leaders in Slovenia and Croatia felt threatened by Milosevic's ambitions. In 1989, the Slovenian Assembly declared that Slovenia had the right to secede from Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia's disintegration accelerated in 1990. By the end of the year, local elections had produced non-communist governments in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia, while in Macedonia the communists formed a minority in a coalition government. Only in Serbia and Montenegro were hard-line communists still firmly in control. The divisions separating Yugoslavia's main ethnic groups were growing increasingly sharp. On one side, the Serbian government was seeking to centralize power in Belgrade. On the other side, Croatian and Slovenian leaders were pushing for a loose confederation. In the middle were officials in Bosnia and Macedonia, who favored a compromise arrangement.

The Outbreak of War

In early 1991, Slovenian and Croatian leaders announced that they would secede from Yugoslavia if a new political arrangement for the country was not reached by June 26, 1991. As the deadline approached, incidents of violence increased. On June 26, Milosevic ordered the Yugoslav army to attack Slovenia. The Slovenes, however, held off the mostly Serbian forces and secured their independence.

War flared up next in Croatia. The conflict there was much more fierce than in Slovenia. In Croatia, the fears of local Serbs were driven by memories of the massacres their people had suffered under Croatian rule during World War II. Fighting first broke out between Serbs and Croats in areas that had witnessed some of the worst *Ustasha* atrocities. As the war heated up, the Yugoslav army lent its support to local Serbian militias. By the end of 1991, Croatia had lost more than 30 percent of its territory. Croatia's Serbs proclaimed the establishment of the "Krajina" republic and asked to become part of Serbia. In response, Croatian President Franjo Tudjman vowed that Croatia would fight to recapture the territory it had lost.

Although the war in Bosnia did not begin until 1992, few doubted the region's potential explosiveness. Bosnia had been Yugoslavia's most ethnically mixed republic – a "little Yugoslavia" where Bosnian Muslim, Serbian, and Croatian communities lived side by side in mountain villages. In Bosnia's capital of Sarajevo, the site of the 1984 Winter Olympics, the three groups shared one of Europe's most ethnically diverse cities.

In February 1992, Bosnian Muslim leaders organized a referendum. The results indicated that a majority of the republic's voters wanted to break away from Yugoslavia. Bosnian Serbs, who constituted roughly one-third of the population, boycotted the referendum. As the republic's largest ethnic group, Bosnian Muslims occupied the leading positions in Bosnia's new government. They also became the primary victims in a three-sided war that began soon after the country's declaration of independence.

As the war in Yugoslavia widened, Milosevic was forced to give up his original goal of preserving the country. Instead, he focused on expanding areas of Serbian domination in Croatia, Bosnia, and elsewhere. In Bosnia, he armed local Serbs and encouraged them to fight against their Muslim and Croatian neighbors. At the same time, he opened talks with Croatian President Tudjman to carve up Bosnia between them. As a result, the territory controlled by Muslim forces steadily shrank. In some areas, Muslims and Croats cooperated to hold off the Serbs. In other areas, they fought one another.

More than 100,000 people have died in the struggle for Bosnia. Most of the deaths have been innocent civilians. Another 1.5 million people have become refugees. As in Croatia, the fighting in Bosnia has extended far beyond military objectives. Rather, the war has been fought for control of the land. The old Yugoslavia, where people of different ethnic backgrounds lived together, has been torn apart by the conflict.

Although all sides have been guilty of atrocities, Serbian forces have been responsible for most of the brutality against civilians. In Bosnia especially, they have sought to eliminate Muslims and Croats from areas under their control. The process of "ethnic cleansing" has featured gang rape, concentration camps, and massacre.

The International Response

The international response to the crisis in Yugoslavia has been slow. Initially, U.S. and Western European leaders sought to hold Yugoslavia together, fearing that a breakup of the country would trigger conflict. Later, they came to suspect Milosevic's intentions, and recognized the independence of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia.

The United Nations (UN) imposed economic sanctions on Yugoslavia in May 1992 to increase the pressure on the Milosevic government. Three months later, the United States, Britain, and France supported a resolution in the UN Security Council that authorized the use of "all necessary means," including force, to ensure that food and medicine reach the suffering in Bosnia. UN forces, however, have been unable to halt the violence and the misery. Serbian forces have frequently blocked UN shipments of relief supplies.

Beginning in August 1992, UN representative Cyrus Vance and European Community representative Lord David Owen worked to negotiate a settlement to the war. The plan they proposed in January 1993 would divide Bosnia into ten self-governing provinces. Bosnian Serb leaders, who today control 70 percent of Bosnia's territory, initially rejected the plan. In May 1993, however, their leader signed the agreement after President Clinton threatened to bomb Serbian positions in Bosnia. The plan hit another obstacle a few days later when the Bosnian Serb parliament insisted that a referendum on the agreement be held among Serbs in Bosnia. Clinton responded by saying that the United States would not tolerate attempts to delay implementation of a peace settlement. Meanwhile, fighting in much of Bosnia continued.

Questions for Consideration

1. Why was Woodrow Wilson's ideal of self-determination especially difficult to put into practice in Yugoslavia?

2. What were the main causes of Yugoslavia's political problems in the years between World War I and World War II?

3. Why was Tito's Yugoslavia unable to survive the death of Tito?

4. How have the historical memories of the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims contributed to the current conflict?

United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights
Situation of Human Rights in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia, February 1993

Bosnia and Herzegovina – General Observations Regarding Ethnic Cleansing

Massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are not simply features of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are being used deliberately to achieve ethnically homogenous areas.

In his first report the Special Rapporteur emphasized the variety of methods used in ethnic cleansing: replacement of extremists by those elected representatives who refused to cooperate with ethnic cleansing, harassment, discrimination, beatings, torture, summary executions. expulsions, forced crossing of the confrontation line, confiscation of property, dismissal from work, intimidation, destruction of mosques, use of the siege and cutting off supplies of food and other essentials to civilian population centres. The report drew on the experience of the city and region of Bihac as well as Bosanska Dubica, Celinac, Sanski Most and Sarajevo.

In his second report the Special Rapporteur described ethnic cleansing in and around Bosanski Novi, Prijedor, Doboj, Kotor Varos, Travnik and conditions in Trnopolje.

In his third report the Special Rapporteur illustrated the deliberate and methodical character of ethnic cleansing carried out by Serb forces in and around the Prijedor area where the aim of this policy had largely been accomplished.

In the present report the Special Rapporteur presents accounts and testimonies which are characteristic of the information which is increasingly becoming available from refugees regarding the systematic nature of ethnic cleansing as well as the human rights and humanitarian law violations. They show methods by which a violent change in the demographic map of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been achieved, leaving 810,000 people displaced internally and 700,000 refugees in other countries formerly part of Yugoslavia.

It is now estimated that two thirds of Bosnia and Herzegovina is under the control of Serb forces, leaving some of the central area, three enclaves in the east and the north-western area of Bihac in the control of government forces.

The Special Rapporteur would like to emphasize that not only Croats and Muslims are the victims of ethnic cleansing; Serbs who refuse to cooperate with this policy have also been victimized. There are reports of the arbitrary execution of such Serbs, for example in Teslic on 2 June 1992 when three Serbs were reportedly killed for refusing to cooperate with the Yugoslav National Peoples' Army (JNA) and Serbian Democratic Party militia in persecuting Muslims and Croats. It had also been reported that the Serbian Neskovic family, accused of hiding Muslims, as well as a commander of the Serbian police were killed because they opposed the killing of Muslims in Bratunac and the surrounding area.

Ukrainians in the Banja Luka region were reportedly subjected to psychological pressure which included the blowing up of the Ukrainian church in Prnjavor, the destruction of the old church in Dubrava and of a village church near Omarska. The homes of Ukrainians were regularly shot at and they were repeatedly asked: "When are you planning to leave, you Ukrainians?". It is reported that by August 1992, all 1,100 of them had decided to do so.

Over and over again in their testimonies, witnesses express their incomprehension at what has happened between neighbors who previously had not made distinctions based on nationality. In January 1993, the Special Rapporteur met a Muslim man and his two daughters in the Croat refugee camp at Reznik, near Zagreb. They came from Prijedor and had fled only a few days previously. This man's testimony speaks for very many:

> "In Prijedor, there were no conflicts between nationalities. We didn't make the distinction. My colleague at work was an Orthodox Serb, we worked together. When we were children we went to the Orthodox church or to the mosque together. I don't understand. Before there were never any

problems between us. We lived together. My sister is married to a Serb and a brother of my wife is married to a Croat. (In June 1992 the family was detained by ethnic Serb forces.) We were in Tronopolje camp for five days. It was horrible. There, one of the Serb guards (who had been the father's work colleague) recognized us and got us out. Some of them help us, others kill us."

A well-orchestrated campaign of intimidation of Muslims and Croats in places under the control of Serb forces is reportedly continuing the policy of ethnic cleansing up to the present time. The Banja Luka and Prijedor areas may be regarded as illustrative. In Banja Luka, Muslims and Croats are reportedly dismissed by employers, evicted from premises which the employer owns and receive official notices that their "protection" has expired. They are harassed on the telephone and their property damaged.

Prijedor used to have a population of 120,000 of whom approximately 65,000 were Muslims and 10,000 were Croats. Today it is estimated that there are only 10,000 Muslims and Croats left and it is reported that, to all intents and purposes, those remaining desperately wish to leave. While visiting the refugee center at Reznik, the Special Rapporteur himself heard, from refugees who had fled Prijedor only days previously, how life there had become impossible: "We were threatened by neighbors. Fear reigns in Prijedor". They were unable, as Muslims, to find work, intimidated and terrorized on the streets, afraid to use local restaurants, had their homes destroyed and were bereft of their old community of friends and relatives. One family, which had arrived in Croatia only four or five days previously, described how their 15-year-old son had sustained the family by trading fruit on the street. They recounted how, on 7 January 1993, New Year, the last mosque in Prijedor was blown up. There had been about 50 mosques. It is reported that now even moderate Serbs are being forced to leave.

It is also reported that, in the mainly Muslim village of Cela near Prijedor, 10 villagers have been shot and killed in their homes in the last few months. Random shootings, bombings and house burnings are reliably reported to be the norm there.

Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur is gravely concerned by reports that ethnic cleansing is currently being carried out by Serb forces especially in towns such as Cerske, Kamenica, Srebrenica, Zepa and Gorazde in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. Problems of access by international monitors and the severing of communications with the outside world have led to grave concern for their inhabitants' safety.

According to current reports the relatively good relationship which previously existed between Muslims and Serbs in Trebinje, southern Bosnia and Herzegovina, has been destroyed. In recent days a large number of the town's Muslim population has fled due to the climate of fear which seems to have developed. The main mosque in the town was reportedly destroyed on 26 January 1993 and a Serb was beaten to death for defending his Muslim friend against civilians.

There are accounts of ethnic cleansing being carried out by Croat forces in the area of Prozor towards the end of 1992. Clashes between Muslim and Croat forces resulted in as many as 3,000 Moslims fleeing into the mountains in October 1992. There are reports of large-scale arbitrary detention of Muslim men, women, and children by Croat forces. Muslim detainees were also reportedly asked to sign an oath of allegiance to the Croat authorities. It is estimated that 70 to 80 Muslim homes were destroyed in Prozor even after combat had stopped. Non-violent attempts by Muslim residents to return to the town after the fighting were reportedly blocked by Croats. The freedom of movement of those Muslims who remain in Prozar has reportedly been severely restricted.

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